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CHASING A DREAM

Paul Crafton Spent Years Pushing His Inventions

On a sultry Saturday morning in 1967, a young Miami Beach lawyer named Norman S. Klein was sitting in his office when a vacationing engineering professor from Washington wearing a baggy suit and scuffed shoes walked in and asked him to draw up papers creating a corporation.

The professor, who said his name was Paul Arthur Crafton and that he was an inventor, made an instant impression.

"The guy was so brilliant he was scary," Klein recalls.

During the next five years Klein and his partners put in hundreds of hours of free legal work and raised \$35,000 for Crafton, convinced that the fantastic-sounding inventions Crafton described would some day make him rich. "You hear about these guys who get 3,000 shares of Xerox in the beginning," said Klein. "That's what I thought we had."

Klein was not alone in his faith. In the course of a 13-year quest to market his inventions, Crafton became involved with a host of busi-

nessmen and investors. Some were relatives and their friends, but others were prominent Washington figures like former CIA operative and arms dealer Edwin P. Wilson, former Ohio Republican representative Donald (Buz) Lukens and lobbyist Michael D. Gill, who served as a deputy chairman of the 1980 Reagan inauguration.

For all of these people, however, the result was always the same: disappointment. None of Crafton's inventions was ever commercially marketed; none of the nearly three dozen corporations he is known to have established from Maryland to the Bahamas apparently ever became a success.

Yet the story of Crafton as inventor and entrepreneur provides one more piece in the complex puzzle of a man described by a Pennsylvania prosecutor as a "true chameleon of identities."

The 59-year-old George Washington University professor first attracted attention when he was arrested March 21 and it became

known that he held teaching jobs at three universities under different names. Prosecutors later said that he used more than 34 aliases at different times and stated in court that he was engaged in a complicated web of international financial dealings.

Crafton, who is scheduled to appear Tuesday in Pennsylvania for a preliminary hearing on some of the 27 counts of forgery, tampering with public records and other charges he faces there, has refused to discuss his past. According to corporate records and interviews with nearly two dozen former associates, however, he was most active as an entrepreneur from 1969 to 1974, but continued his efforts as recently as three years ago.

Many of those who knew him during those years say he rarely talked about himself, his past or the full-time professorship he held at GWU. To those associates, like many others who met him in later years, adding up all the parts in Crafton's life proved impossible.

"I knew one Paul Crafton," said Gill, who regarded Crafton as a cross between Thomas Edison and the prototypical absent-minded professor. "I didn't know the others."

Crafton was born Paul Arthur Cohen in New York City, the middle child and second son of European immigrants who settled in Brooklyn's Sheepshead Bay. Days after his graduation from the City College of New York in 1944, where he majored in mechanical engineering and was at the top of his class, Crafton came to Washington where he joined the Naval Research Lab in South-

Crafton joined the GWU faculty in 1956, the year he received a top-secret security clearance at the lab. He held both full-time jobs until his retirement from the lab in 1969, two years after he met Klein, who never knew about his Navy job.

Although he had an academic background, Crafton sought practical applications for his ideas. In 1967, the year he walked into Klein's Miami Beach office, he established his own laboratory on the second floor of an Oxon Hill office building. Visitors remember it was festooned with cables, transformers and other hallmarks of a working lab.

"It was not particularly sophisticated by any means," said Joseph Remz, assistant to the chairman of the Ohio-based American Electric Power Co., who visited the lab in the early 1970s. "He was doing preliminary work and sometimes a guy with relatively modest resources can come up with a good system. We

were interested, but Crafton just never followed through."

From 1966 to 1976, Crafton obtained patents on seven inventions, but his efforts were focused on selling three devices: a hotel lock system similar to that currently used by major hotel chains, a credit card verification system similar to that used in automatic bank teller machines and a remote-control device to read utility meters and automatically adjust power loads from a central computer.

Klein said Crafton's technical wizardry, self-confidence and seemingly limitless capacity for work inspired confidence among the Florida lawyers and investors.

"I just had tremendous faith in him," said Klein, who said he still vividly remembers the time Crafton demonstrated two of his inventions for security systems in his office. "I told my friends and [law partners],